

CRITIC'S PICK

'Vera' Review: No Faking

In this hybrid film by Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel, the actress Vera Gemma portrays a complex and vulnerable version of herself.



By **Austin Considine**

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Vera · NYT Critic's Pick · Directed by Tizza Covi, Rainer Frimmel · Drama · Not Rated · 1h 55m

It is likely you've never heard of Vera Gemma, a minor 50-something Italian actress of the kind who winds up on the extruding end of the movieland meat grinder with all the plastic surgery and little recognition.

But you may remember her father, Giuliano Gemma, a classically handsome Italian star of many spaghetti westerns. Like other children of celebrities, Vera lives a life of quiet desperation in her father's shadow. Unsurprisingly, that shadow is dark and crowded with monsters. That this compelling film somehow manages to feel hopeful is a minor miracle of careful artistry.

Written and directed by the Italo-Austrian duo Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel, "Vera" is not a documentary, but neither is it wholly fiction. Gemma plays a version of herself, whose friends include Asia Argento, another daughter of Italian cinematic royalty. Viewers can only guess whether the real-life Gemma is so desperate for affection that she is constantly exploited. We don't know whether she hangs a giant painting of her father over her bed. Evidence suggests the lines are blurry.

But in Covi and Frimmel's hands, this is no mere meta-narrative gimmick. And if the tragic turns become predictable, that's partly because we trust that Vera, played with a heartbreaking lack of self-pity, will always choose to believe people are good. If this review's introductory description of Gemma seemed harsh, be assured that the directors' lens is even less filtered. "Brave" is often a byword today for opportunism, degraded by the same media trends that debase Vera. This film and Gemma's strikingly vulnerable performance help reclaim the word's proper meaning.

Vera

Not rated. In Italian, with subtitles. Running time: 1 hour 55 minutes. In theaters.

Vera NYT Critic's Pick

Directors Tizza Covi, Rainer Frimmel

Writer Tizza Covi

Stars Asia Argento, Annamaria Ciancamerla, Sebastian Dascalu, Daniel De Palma, Alessandra Di Sanzo

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